



Lucille interviewing Sybil, as told in our last issue.

THE WAY OF THESE WOMEN

Drawings by Frank Snapp

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

CHAPTER XXXIX

A FEW evenings later Jermyn arrived at St. Pancras about eight o'clock, after a week's stay in Scotland. He drove at once to his club, and stared a little blankly at the handful of letters the hall porter handed him in reply to his eager inquiry. There was not a line from Sybil. He looked them through once more, and turned somewhat aimlessly toward the smoking room. Coming out, he almost ran into Sir James. The latter stopped at once.

"Just back from Scotland?" he inquired.

"This minute," Jermyn replied.

Sir James looked at the little pile of letters Jermyn was carrying. "You will find two notes there from me," he remarked.

Jermyn glanced down at them. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Nothing at all. I simply invited you to lunch. There was a little matter I felt I should like to discuss with you."

"What about now?" Jermyn asked. "Have you dined?"

"Just on my way to order a sole and cutlet," Sir James declared. "Come and join me."

"I'll wash my hands and be there in five minutes," Jermyn agreed. "I had better telephone home too."

"You haven't been home yet, then?"

Jermyn shook his head. "I sent my man on with the luggage and came straight here," he explained. "Order something for me, will you—just the same as you are having? I am not hungry. I have been in the train all day."

He went to the telephone and made a few casual inquiries. Lady Annerley, the servant who answered the telephone believed, was dining out. The car was ordered for a quarter past eight.

"You will let her Ladyship know that I have returned," Jermyn instructed. "I shall probably be here for sometime."

HE made his way to the dining room and sat down to dinner with the physician. They talked for awhile on casual topics. Then Sir James began slowly to draw near the subject that was all the time in his mind.

"I went a few nights ago, Jermyn," he said, "to the Imperial Theater. I knew your play was good; but I didn't expect to enjoy it so much. Not only is the play good, but I tell you frankly I think that Miss Cluley is a marvelous actress."

For the first time Jermyn smiled. "She is quite wonderful," he admitted. "I am glad you went. I know you're not much of a playgoer."

"I am not," Sir James confessed. "I used to enjoy the old-fashioned sort of thing; but science makes so many demands upon us nowadays that one has very little time of any sort for diversion. Besides, I don't like the modern play. I am sick of seeing everything from the French. It isn't wholesome. In fact, there are many phases of modern life, Jermyn, that don't please an old stager like myself. I am going to talk to you about one for a minute or two now, if I may."

Jermyn looked up in some surprise. "Go ahead, by all means," he said. "You provoke my curiosity."

"Your wife has consulted me about her health."

Jermyn's expression hardened. "I have not heard that she has been unwell," he remarked.

"She is not unwell," his companion pronounced, bluntly. "She is only dying."

Jermyn set down the glass that he had been in the act

of raising to his lips. His hands were trembling. "Are you serious, Sir James?"

"Is it a matter to discuss in any other spirit? Your wife hasn't an unsound organ in her body, and yet she is dying."

"What is the matter with her, then?"

"You!" the physician replied gravely.

There was a brief silence. Then Jermyn laughed a little hardly.

"If you were a modern practitioner, my friend," he said, "I am afraid I should look upon this as something of a dodge."

"You can call it what you like," the other declared. "You know very well that I hate all quackery, and that I am not given to sensational speeches. I am fond of you, young man, and I am fond of your wife. I tell you frankly that there is a wasting process going on inside Lucille, against which science is of

no avail. She is fretting herself into the grave. I had to ask her questions. I asked them professionally, and she answered professionally; but they tell the story, you know."

"Doctor," said Jermyn, "I have never looked upon you as given to exaggeration, and am not accusing you of it now; but are you sure that you quite understand Lucille? She is very excitable and nervous and highly strung. She came to you in one of her moments of depression. You might very easily form an idea of her condition that was a little misleading."

Sir James poured himself a glass of wine. "I brought Lucille into the world," he continued. "I attended her throughout her girlhood. I traveled over to France to see her when she had typhoid. I do not believe that she has ever voluntarily consulted another doctor. She has been like one of my own children to me. Everything that I have told you is the truth and more than the truth. I speak, of course, in complete ignorance of any circumstances there may be between you to explain what, on the face of it, seems so strange. I can only deal with facts. Lucille is dying. She will die if you do not save her. It is my duty to tell you this."

Curiously enough, after the first shock, Jermyn's succeeding impulse was one of anger. "Look here, Doctor!" he said. "Supposing there was a cause of offense between my wife and myself, so great that, however strange it may seem to you, there was dishonor in my even simulating an affection for her that I could not feel, do you still sit there and tell me that her state of health is my responsibility?"

"I am a doctor and not a philosopher," Sir James remarked dryly. "Honor and dishonor I do not understand; not the modern view of them, at any rate. The position of husband and wife has been the same since the world was made, and always will be; although the present generation seems to do nothing but kick at it. You may alter schools of thought, you may build up new standards, establish new cults and new sects, but you can't do away with the obligations of the marriage ceremony. I don't wish to know anything more than I do know. It is my duty to point out your responsibility; and to my thinking, at any rate, there isn't anything in this world that could absolve you if Lucille dies without your making an effort to save her. Shall we take our coffee outside? I am going on to a meeting at the hospital."

Jermyn waved him away. "I'd rather you went," he said simply. "I want to think."

Sir James rose from his place and for a moment let his arm rest upon Jermyn's shoulder. "I am an old fool, I suppose," he declared; "but, Jermyn, there's only one way out of a tangle, and there isn't anyone who can show it to you so well as you can find it out for yourself, if you'll only be honest."

JERMYN, a little later on, found a secluded corner in the reading room and threw himself into an easy chair. A crowd of hateful thoughts were pressing in upon him. There were things that he was forced to admit. Since the day of his marriage it had been a changed Lucille who had lived like a shadow at his side. Even as he sat there, he could think of a hundred cases of his brutality toward her. He had told himself that he was simply being consistent. He had promised nothing; he had nothing to give. He followed their tour, in his thoughts, from city to city, and back again to England. It was a changed Lucille, indeed! He had watched her grow quieter and quieter. He remembered—his heart ached with dull pain when he remembered the many times when she had made those timid appeals to him,—the imploring light of her eyes, the small artifices she

had used, the half-frightened entreaties for just a little tenderness, a word, a touch even of his fingers.

The night before he had left for Scotland—he thought of it now almost with fear—he had lain awake in his room and had heard a strange sound. He had crept to the keyhole of the communicating door, which as yet he had never unlocked, and listened. He seemed to hear the sound now again in the silence that reigned around him,—the sound of a woman moaning and sobbing quietly through the hours of the night! This was a new and a terrible thing that had come into his life, a new tragedy that he had no idea, at the moment, how to face.

The time slipped away. He rose at last a little wearily and made his way round to the theater. The performance was just over, and he met Leunden in the passage by the doorkeeper's office. He fancied that the latter seemed none too pleased to see him.

"You back, Sir Jermyn?" the manager exclaimed. "By Jove! I wish I'd known that you were going to be in town! We've a small supper party on tonight. Couldn't you get off home," he added, glancing at Jermyn's attire, "and change and join us later?"

"Not tonight, I am afraid," Jermyn replied. "Thank you all the same. I have been traveling all day. Miss Cluley hasn't left, I hope?"

"No, I think she is just drinking up," Leunden told him. "She is supping with us."

Jermyn stopped short. "Supping with you?" he repeated.

"My wife and I both think," Leunden continued, "that Miss Cluley has been living much too secluded a life. I am thankful to say that she is beginning to break through it just a little. She is coming to the artists' ball tomorrow. Young Lord Lakenham is giving a great supper party. A connection of yours, by the way, isn't he, Sir Jermyn? You ought to come. A writer ought to see all sides of life, you know."

Jermyn turned slowly round. "If Miss Cluley is going out to supper," he said, "I won't wait now."

"She'll like to see you for a moment, I expect," the manager remarked. "Perhaps she'll be able to persuade you to join us."

Jermyn hesitated. It was a queer little world which seemed crumbling about his ears. "No, I won't bother her now," he decided. "I shall see her tomorrow sometime."

JERMYN passed out, just managing to escape Gerald, who was alighting from his car outside. He jumped into a taxi and drove home.

"Your mistress in?" he inquired mechanically of Roberts, as the latter relieved him of his hat and overcoat.

"Her Ladyship has not been out this evening, Sir Jermyn," the butler informed him. "She was dining at Dorington House, and was on the point of starting when she felt unwell. It was just after you had telephoned from the club, Sir. She has been alone in her boudoir all the evening. I believe she is there now, Sir."

Jermyn slowly ascended the stairs and knocked at the door of the end room of Lucille's little suite. There was no answer. He turned the handle softly and entered. Lucille was lying on a couch in a white dressing gown. There were some smelling salts, the evening paper, a novel, and a bowl of roses on a small table by her side. He closed the door quietly and came farther into the room. Then he saw that she was asleep. He stood with his feet buried in the thick fur of the white rug, looking down at her. A curious little pain pulled at his heartstrings. He was conscious of a new feeling with regard to her, a sense of immense, almost infinite pity. Even in repose, her face was absolutely the face of a tortured woman. There were lines under her eyes, hollows in her cheeks; her neck too had grown thinner. She was beautiful still, but in a queer, unearthly sort of fashion. Suddenly she opened her eyes and saw him. It was as though a miracle had taken place. Her whole appearance was transformed. Her face seemed to fill out, her eyes to soften. She grew at once younger.

"Jermyn!" she cried. "You here? Has anything happened?"

He came and sat at the end of the sofa. Perhaps something of that expression with which he had been gazing down upon her had already vanished from his face; for her first wild impulse of joy showed signs of passing away.

"Nothing at all," he answered. "Roberts told me just now that you were not well, and I looked in for a moment to see what was the matter. It is nothing serious, I trust?"

She looked at him wistfully for a brief space of time before she replied. "No, it is nothing serious," she